

Testimony for the Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2022

My name is Francine Homand and I am from Stonington. I am testifying on the Governor's proposed budget H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 that unfortunately does not include critical funding for our safety net providers and their employees.

After decades of underfunding, Connecticut's direct support providers are in crisis mode because the effects of the pandemic have impacted their ability to attract and retain direct care workers and other employees. This staff is critically important to the safety and well-being of many of Connecticut's residents with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD), including my own family.

My son, Tyler Homand has been in the Groton system since high school and has greatly benefited from the service provided through the ARC program. Not only did he enjoy every job he tried out, although his initial "trying something new" was never easy, but as he gets older those changes are becoming less of a dramatic issue for him and he is able to roll with the changes much easier. Much of that has to do with the training he's received from the ARC program over the years. But aside from the work Tyler also made many friends that he truly enjoys spending time with. The ARC also provided an after work program called "SPARKS", where all of them would do activities as a group, learning different life skills, which they all needed.

Once COVID hit all programs were immediately closed leaving Tyler, and all other adults with IDD that he works with at ARC (and other agencies as well), at a complete stand still, and he was involved in many different activities, aside from ARC as well. This was devastating to him and to our family. Tyler was lost. And all of these kids need their routines or else they tend to shut down, reverting back into themselves and they've worked too hard to get where they are to go backwards. Working is what gives them value and a feeling that they belong and are making a difference in their world.

This program is critical to our children and families. And without adequate support our children are denied the ability to be useful in the community and to "make their own way" in this world. Tyler has learned so much from this amazing program and without the proper funding to keep it staffed up with everything they require to run smoothly, our children suffer, as well as all the workers as well.

Without your help, our state's community service delivery system will continue to shrink and our loved ones will bear the brunt of this loss. We are already experiencing the worst staffing crisis that service providers have ever seen, which has resulted in an inability to resume programs paused during COVID and caused a rebound effect for family caregivers who are unable to return to work and contribute to Connecticut's economy.

Now more than ever, we need to ensure that critically necessary funding of \$150 million is included in this year's budget for the state's non-profit providers who care for our loved ones on a daily basis. We urge your support and ask that you add this funding to the budget before this committee. My Child Matters=>8%.